

New fauna, flora found in 130-million-year old rainforest

GERIK: A team of researchers on a scientific expedition to the Royal Belum State Park here recently has discovered several plants and animals that could be a new species.

Among the flora samples that were collected in the 130-million-year old rainforest were several types of citrus, fungus and medicinal plants.

The team also found 14 small mammals, including a rare type of bat.

Pulau Banding Foundation chief executive officer Datuk Dr Abdul Rashid Malik, who led the team, said they would need more time to confirm whether the species found were new or rare species that were endemic to the state park.

"We expect the findings to have an impact on the forest and the pharmaceutical industry.

"The information on flora and fauna from the expedition will be used as supporting documents in the application to list Royal Belum as a World Heritage Site under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco)," he told the *New Straits Times* yesterday.

The idea to list the rainforest as a Unesco World Heritage Site was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak last year and was supported by the state government.

Rashid said some of the discoveries included medicinal plants used by the Orang Asli to cure certain diseases.

He said researchers from Universiti Putra Malaysia collected 60 flowering plant samples, including a citrus specimen.

Rashid said the groups that collected fungus and medicinal plants discovered various unique specimens, including six ginger samples.

The specimens need to undergo examination to determine whether they are new findings or rare species.

"The research in developing the specimens into phytomedicine is time consuming and costly."

He said a number of interesting findings of fauna were made by a mammal study group from the Forest Research Institute Malaysia.

The group collected more than 14 samples of small mammals, including a rare type of bat.

The bat was obtained from following four expedition trails in Sungai Tiang.

Rashid said most of the trails used during the expedition, from Sept 8 until Sept 17, were routes used by wild animals and Orang Asli.

"Most of the specimens were collected along these trails.

"The medicinal plant and fungus groups have benefited greatly from these trails as the samples obtained were more prevalent along these routes."

He said a post-expedition press conference would be held by the end of this month to highlight the new findings.

The findings would also be discussed in a symposium, which would be held in July or August next year.

The 10-day expedition, which involved more than 200 participants, focused their research on the areas near Sungai Tiang and Sungai Kejar.

Among the participants in the expedition were scientists from 10 local public and private universities and three national research institutions.



A team of **researchers cataloguing butterflies** caught in the Royal Belum Park in Perak recently. Pic by Ghazali Kori